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RE: Boston 2000: A Plan for the Central Artery  
Project Overview

Introduction: BRA Air-Rights Park Plan

The Boston Redevelopment Authority has just completed the Plan and Zoning for the City's Central Artery Air-Rights Park System in the heart of downtown, a project created out of newly reclaimed land made available through the depression of the existing I-93 Interstate highway. The highway reconstruction is necessary due to the roadway's inability to cope with current traffic demands - which are now more than double its intended capacity - and its detrimental effects on the urban environment. The Plan calls for 75% of the land to be developed as a series of parks and urban plazas that are defined by the five downtown districts through which the Corridor passes: the Bulfinch Triangle, the North End/Waterfront Neighborhood, Government Center, the Financial District and the Chinatown Neighborhood. These district parks will be anchored at their ends by new cultural facilities and framed along their length by new infill development. The Plan proposes up to 1,000 housing units for the Chinatown and North End neighborhoods as well as identifying economic development areas for both neighborhoods. Finally, the Plan reconciles the inherent conflicts between pedestrians and automobiles through establishing a boulevard and park system which favors the pedestrian and reins in the automobile.

(1991)

These parks will be knit together by two parallel tree-lined boulevards. These boulevards define the edges of the Air-Rights Corridor - approximately 200 feet in width and approximately 1.5 miles in length - that will weave together Boston's historic cross-streets into a comprehensive pedestrian-oriented network connecting the downtown to the harbor. Through the reconstruction of the historic cross streets and their connection to the boulevards, a more legible downtown urban grid will be established. The park and boulevard plan will establish a new common ground that will reinforce and extend Boston's existing open space system.

#### Infrastructure Overview

The Central Artery/Third Harbor Tunnel project provides the opportunity to redress some of the planning errors made by the construction of the original I-93 roadway in the early 1950's. The original elevated expressway was envisioned as a new life line to a decaying urban center. However, today it is choking the City it was meant to resuscitate. The new tunnel project will make possible, through air-rights developments, the reconfiguration of a significant portion of the downtown and thus restore the previously-damaged downtown neighborhoods, enhance the City's cherished pedestrian qualities, particularly around the downtown core - Faneuil Hall/Quincy Market and the Waterfront areas - and balance, through park development, the 17 million square feet of commercial development which has been built in the last 20 years.



The \$4.5 billion highway and tunnel construction project undertaken by the Massachusetts Department of Public Works, is scheduled to begin this calendar year and be completed by 1998. The project connects a total of nine exit and entry ramps into and out of the downtown to the two new surface boulevards. The downtown tunnel portion is approximately one-third of the overall transportation project and will reclaim over 40 acres of new air-rights in the core of downtown Boston. At least 20 acres of this land will be designed as parks and will more than triple the amount of open space in the downtown over the last 25 years. The remaining land will be divided between street right-of-ways and selective infill development parcels for either residential, mixed-use development, or cultural facilities.

#### The Concept Design

The concept design for the Central Artery continues a Boston tradition in infrastructure and environmental planning by creating, through a highway project, a system of new downtown parks, gardens, and other public amenities for the 21st century. This concept design is as significant to the City as the 19th century establishment of Olmsted's Emerald Necklace Plan and the 20th century development of the Charles River Esplanade and the Southwest Corridor Transitway/Park Project. During the later 19th and early 20th centuries, a generation of Bostonians made the investment in a visionary concept for the City's future and its open space system through developing an extraordinary array

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of parks, boulevards, and esplanades. The City's leaders aspired to create a common ground where people from all levels of society could mix and be restored and invigorated by the natural realm. Following that tradition, the concept design proposes a sequence of park spaces which will include an Arboretum, a Conservatory and Botanical Garden, a skating rink and carousel, an Asian Garden, playgrounds for all ages as well as formal promenades. These unique park spaces will simultaneously serve visitors from afar, workers from the downtown, and residents from adjacent neighborhoods.

The design concept for the North End and Chinatown neighborhood parks envisions a major gateway plaza centered on the principal neighborhood retail street surrounded by green parks and recreation areas and framed at either end by new community buildings. This public space will become the community's porch and front yard to the larger City. The downtown markets and waterfront park extends the already world-famous character of Quincy Market while adding a sculpture garden, cultural exhibits which reflect Boston maritime history and a series of family recreational elements such as the carousel and an ice skating rink. The central theme for the Financial District park is the creation of an urban arboretum and botanical garden/conservatory which will be connected to the rest of the City by a formal promenade. This new center for cultural



and educational activities will reinforce the other adjacent activities such as the Children's Museum, the Tea Party Ship and Computer Museum. Each of the four parks will be designed to their program and context yet will be integrated to each other through the overall continuity of the two new boulevards.

#### Community Planning Process

The Plan prepared by the BRA is a result of a broadly-based four-year community review process during which several public forums were held to stimulate debate. The concept design for the parks and buildings and the Plan has been developed as a framework for implementation over the next ten years, incorporating the vision of citizens and policy makers alike. The design and Plan illustrate the opportunities which will be created through the demolition of the elevated highway. The Concept Plan has been adopted by the public and the City as well as included as the Air-Rights Plan in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS). A Federal Record of Decision for this project is expected by mid-April '91. Concurrently, the City of Boston is to adopt final new Zoning for the Air-rights Corridor district which will legally embody the concept design and planning guidelines into the Zoning. The Central Artery District is one of 11 special study districts in the downtown which is being rezoned as a part of the City's overall Plan to Manage Growth. This Plan was initiated in 1987 and will be complete once the Artery Corridor Plan is approved





### Implementation

The Boston Redevelopment Authority's approval of the Zoning on April 25, 1991, begins the final stages of the City's overall planning and Zoning approvals. The Zoning Board will meet next month for its deliberations and decision. The final approval by the Federal Government, through its Record of Decision, and the adoption of the Plan and Zoning by the City follows an earlier decision by the Commonwealth's Secretary of the Environment who, in reviewing the draft FSEIS mandated that the City's Plan and its concept design be included as a mitigation measure for the Artery project and be adopt as the City's Plan for the Commonwealth's proposed FSEIS. The Secretary insures the following: 1) that 75% of the land be developed as open space; 2) that the Commonwealth develop housing within the Corridor for the Chinatown and North End neighborhoods; 3) that automobile circulation be restricted to a maximum of 3 travel lanes for the north and southbound boulevards; 4) that surface street parking be restricted; and 5) that the City and Commonwealth cooperate to locate and develop opportunities for cultural and educational uses within the Park Plan.

Detailed designs of the air-rights are to evolve over the next decade. The North End and Chinatown community parks will be designed through a process open to community participation and comment. In this way the communities are assured that their needs and aspirations are met. The Concept Design and Zoning approval will also set in place building guidelines and loading



parameters for Central Artery tunnel engineers to follow in preparing their final designs for the tunnel and its ancillary structures that will support the proposed air-rights uses.

Final designs for the new parks in the Waterfront and Financial Districts, which will become an integral part of the identity of Downtown Boston, can be best produced through highly publicized competitions with active citizen review and participation. Public buildings within the Artery District can also be designed through competition. Both public and private buildings are to be subject to the applicable Central Artery design guidelines and a comprehensive BRA development review procedure.

The City's Plan and concept design presents a new image for Boston in the 21st century that reflects its character as a city of neighborhoods and Boston's role as an international center for commerce and technology.



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